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AUTHOR Singh, Bulwant
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ABSTRACT

Reported are responses of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students, their parents and teachers to a survey conducted to determine the need for a homework hotline. Discussion is based on data from 379 randomly selected parents of students in intermediate elementary grades of 21 elementary schools, 333 elementary school teachers, and 392 randomly selected students. Respondents' opinions dealt with such concerns as the value of homework, grade at which homework should begin, parent role in helping children with their homework, the need to establish a homework hotline service in various subjects, the beginning time and duration of such a service, and the days of the week which are most suitable for such a service. Among the results, 39 percent of students, 39 percent of parents, and only 10 percent of teachers indicated they would like to have a homework hotline for one or two evenings per week. Included in the discussion are selected comments of respondents, an estimate of the cost of establishing a homework hotline service, and one possible way of funding such a service. (RH)

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RESULTS OF A SURVEY ABOUT HOMEWORK AND HOMEWORK HOTLINES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the results of a survey which is based upon the responses of 379 randomly selected parents of students in grades four, five, and six of 21 elementary schools in a school district. It also describes the responses of 333 elementary school teachers and 392 randomly selected students in grades four, five and six. The respondent opinions deal with the value of homework, grade at which it should begin, parent role in helping children with their homework, the need to establish a homework hotline service in various subjects, the beginning time and duration of such a service, the days of the week which are most suitable for such a service, etc. Selected respondent comments, approximate cost of establishing a homework hotline service and one possible way of funding such as a service have also been included.

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RESULTS OF A SURVEY ABOUT HOMEWORK AND HOMEWORK HOTLINES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS*

by

Balwant Singh

Fulton County Board of Education
Atlanta, Georgia

INTRODUCTION:

Although the results of studies dealing with the effects of homework on student achievement are inconclusive (Barber 1986, Friesen, 1979 and Austin, 1978), there is an overriding perception among educators, parents and even students that homework does help students do better in school. On the other hand, many children do not have adequate facilities to do their work at home and many others are without the guidance of a knowledgeable adult at home. The establishment of telephone or video homework hotlines to help students with their homework is an excellent example of the work of schools to make up for such deficiencies.

This paper is based upon a survey which was conducted to determine the need for establishing a homework hotline in a school district in Iowa and deals with the responses of students in grades four, five and six, parents and teachers of elementary school students. Although the counselors, teacher aides, principals and central office administrators were also surveyed, their responses will not be discussed here because their numbers were relatively small.

METHOD:

One questionnaire each was designed for elementary school students, parents and educators (teachers, counselors and administrators). Some of the questions were common to all of the three questionnaires, while others were included only in one of them. For example, we asked teachers the way they handled homework submitted by their students and we asked students if their homework in various subjects was too much, too little or just right. But we asked all of the three said groups if homework helps students (or you) do better in school.

* Award winning paper presented at the annual convention of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April 1988

Table 1

Student, Parent and Teacher Responses to
Questions Concerning Homework

	Students (N=392)	Parents (N=379)	Teachers (N=333)
1. Does homework help you/students do better in school?			
A. Yes	80%	92%	84%
B. No	20%	7%	14%
2. At what grade level should homework begin?			
A. Below grade 3	14%	30%	30%
B. At grade 3 or 4	52%	46%	45%
C. At grade 5 or 6	19%	16%	13%
D. At grade 7 or higher	8%	4%	8%
E. I do not believe in giving homework.	8%	3%	4%
3. What should be the role of parents in helping children with their homework?			
A. They should assist children directly with their homework but should not do it for them.	72%	83%	82%
B. They should provide moral support only.	16%	12%	11%
C. They should leave homework entirely to their children.	4%	1%	1%
D. I do not believe in giving homework to students.	7%	2%	5%
4. How much time do you/should students spend on homework each evening?			
A. Up to 15 minutes	23%	16%	31%
B. Between 16 and 45 minutes	53%	47%	41%
C. Between 46 and 75 minutes	14%	15%	2%
D. More than 75 minutes	7%	5%	0%
E. Do not know / Not sure / Do all homework at school / Do not believe in giving homework	2%	4%	26%

SAMPLE:

Parents: A stratified random sample of 901 parents of children in grades four, five and six of 21 elementary schools of a school district in Iowa was selected. The sample selected was 22 percent of the student population in those grades. Parents were asked to complete the questionnaires anonymously and stamped, self-addressed envelopes were provided for returning the completed questionnaires. Three hundred and seventy nine (42 percent) of the parents returned the completed questionnaires.

Teachers: All elementary school teachers were invited to participate in this study and completed questionnaires from 333 of them were received.

Students: The 21 schools in the district which had grades four, five and six were divided into three groups, each of which consisted of some urban, some suburban and some rural schools. Questionnaires were administered to only one grade four class (selected at random) in each of the seven schools in Group I. Similarly questionnaires were administered to only one grade five class from each of the schools in Group II and one grade six class from each of the schools in Group III. In all, 392 elementary school students participated in this study.

RESULTS

The percentages of participant responses to various questions were computed. We will first discuss the responses to those questions which were common to the three questionnaires.

OPINIONS ABOUT HOMEWORK:

Table 1 shows the responses of students, parents and teachers to questions about homework. It can be seen in Table 1 that:

- Eighty percent or more of the students, teachers and parents surveyed believe that homework helps students do better in school.

- A majority of the students and more than 44 percent of the teachers and parents think that homework should begin at grade 3 or 4.

- More than 71 percent of the students, parents and teachers surveyed think that parents should directly assist children with their homework but should not do it for them.

- A majority of the students and more than 40 percent of the parents and teachers are of the opinion that students should spend between 16 and 45 minutes each evening, on their homework.

Table 2

Student, Parent and Teacher Responses to Questions Dealing with a Homework Hotline

	Students (N=392)	Parents (N=379)	Teachers (N=333)
1. How many evenings per week should a homework hotline be offered?			
A. Five or more evenings per week.	10%	3%	13%
B. Four evenings per week.	5%	4%	15%
C. Three evenings per week.	11%	15%	7%
D. One or two evenings per week.	39%	39%	10%
E. Do not need such a service / will not use it.	31%	31%	52%
2. In which subject(s) should a homework hotline be provided?			
A. English	26%	25%	41%
B. Mathematics	47%	46%	46%
C. Science	25%	22%	38%
D. Social Studies	39%	30%	35%
3. What day(s) of the week are suitable for a homework hotline service?			
A. Monday	51%	56%	40%
B. Tuesday	51%	57%	42%
C. Wednesday	52%	55%	38%
D. Thursday	52%	59%	42%
E. Friday	43%	27%	9%
F. Saturday	29%	13%	4%
G. Sunday	33%	28%	14%
4. At what time of the evening do you begin your homework / should the hotline service begin?			
A. 6:30 p.m.	24%	41%	30%
B. 7:00 p.m.	10%	12%	14%
C. 7:30 p.m.	7%	2%	1%
D. 8:00 p.m.	5%	1%	0%
E. Other	50%	10%	4%
5. For how many hours each evening should such a service be offered?			
A. One hour	18%	8%	8%
B. One and one-half hour	7%	13%	11%
C. Two hours	10%	31%	19%
D. Two and one-half hours	6%	5%	4%
E. Three hours	35%	8%	5%

OPINIONS ABOUT HOMEWORK HOTLINE:

Several questions dealt with the operation of a homework hotline and the responses of students, parents and teachers are shown in Table 2. It can be seen in Table 2 (page 4) that:

- Fifty-two percent of the teachers and 31 percent of the parents and students think that a homework hotline service is either not needed or will not be used. Thirty-nine percent of the students and parents and only 10 percent of the teachers would like to have a homework hotline service for one or two evenings per week.
- As far as the subject in which such a service is needed, is concerned, 47 percent of the students and 46 percent of the parents and teachers would like to have it for the area of mathematics. A much larger percentage of teachers as compared to parents and students, would like to have the hotline service in the areas of English and science.

- Monday through Thursday evenings are considered to be suitable for the homework hotline service by all of the three groups.

- Forty-one percent of the parents, 30 percent of the teachers and 24 percent of the students would like such a service to begin at 6:30 p.m.; however, 50 percent of the students surveyed would like such a service to begin at times other than the ones provided on the questionnaire (between 6:30 and 8:00 p.m.). Presumably, the students would like to finish their homework immediately after school and would like the hotline to be available at that time.

- Finally, there seems to be no consensus amongst the three groups about the duration of such a service. Thirty-five percent of the students would like to have it for three hours per evening but 31 percent of the parents and 19 percent of the teachers would like it to be of only two hour duration. For this question, the percentages for all other choices by the three groups are lower than the ones mentioned above.

We will now summarize the findings from questions, which were addressed to specific audiences only.

Table 3

Student Feelings About the Amount of Homework Given

How do you feel about the homework you get in the following subjects?

	English (N=392)	Math (N=392)	Science (N=392)	Social Studies (N=392)
Too much	12%	26%	10%	23%
Just Right	53%	57%	39%	51%
Not enough	14%	11%	12%	10%
Not given	18%	6%	35%	13%
Not applicable	2%	1%	5%	3%

Table 4

Student Responses Regarding the Correction of their Homework

How frequently is your homework in the following subjects corrected and returned to you?

	English (N=392)	Math (N=392)	Science (N=392)	Social Studies (N=392)
Always	50%	66%	42%	52%
Most of the time	21%	18%	15%	23%
Sometimes	19%	12%	17%	18%
Never	4%	2%	7%	4%
Not applicable	6%	1%	18%	4%

STUDENTS:

Tables 3 and 4 (page 6) respectively, show students responses to questions dealing with their assessment of the amount of homework given and the frequency with which it is corrected and returned to them. Table 3 shows that a majority of the students consider their homework in the areas of English, mathematics and social studies to be 'just right' whereas, only 39 percent of the students consider it to be 'just right' in the area of science. Nearly one-fourth of the students surveyed consider the homework in the areas of mathematics and social studies to be 'too much'. The percentages of the students who claim that they do not get any homework in the areas of English, science and social studies are 18, 35, and 13 respectively. Eighty-four percent of the students surveyed say that their homework in the area of mathematics is always (or most of the time) returned to them but only 57 percent of them say that for the area of science, (Table 4).

The responses of parents and teachers have not been presented in tabular form here because of lack of space.

PARENTS:

Sixty-one percent of the parents consider the amount of homework given to their children to be adequate but 20 percent of them think that it is less than needed and nine percent feel that it is more than needed. Ninety percent of the parents state that their children bring home the work assigned by their teachers.

TEACHERS:

One-third of the teachers surveyed give homework once a week and 16 percent of them do so twice a week; another 16% of the teachers give homework three or four times a week. Sixty-three percent of the teachers surveyed either grade and return or record and return homework submitted by their students. Finally, only one percent of the teachers say that they do not keep track of their students' homework.

SELECTED RESPONDENT COMMENTS:

Teachers should get together and not give homework in every subject every night.

Please no homework over the weekends. Children are under pressure so they need time to be children.

Consider using education majors from local colleges to staff a homework hotline. Compensation would be at a lower rate and the students could use the money to complete their education. They might even be able to receive academic credit for all or part of student teaching for this service.

Provide help to students on a one-to-one basis in school on Saturday afternoons or selected evenings and charge small fees for this service. Another alternative will be to schedule the last hour of the school day for one-to-one tutoring, on a rotational basis.

Not suitable for students who have communication problems.

A telephone hotline will be used as a crutch by the weaker students and might even encourage inattention in class.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

To sum up, our research indicates that there is more demand for such a service at the secondary level than at the elementary level (Singh, 1987) and the percentages of parents and students surveyed who want a homework hotline service are much larger than the percentage of the teachers, who want such a service. However, the percentages of teachers who want the said service in English and science are considerably greater than the corresponding percentages of the students and parents. Mondays through Thursdays are considered to be suitable for such a service and any two of these days would be sufficient to meet the needs of the students. The parents and teachers surveyed want such a service to begin at 6:30 p.m.; presumably, the students would prefer it to begin soon after school. Although there was no consensus among the three groups surveyed, about the duration of such a service, we feel that three hours per evening will suffice.

The cost of providing a homework hotline service will obviously depend upon such factors as the wages of the teachers in the area, duration and frequency of the service etc. A school district of approximately 40,000 students in the Atlanta, Georgia area for example, spends around fifty thousand dollars each year, on such a service. Six telephone lines are operational for three hours, on each of the four designated evenings in a week, throughout the school year.

It should not be difficult to obtain funding for the establishment of a homework hotline in a school district through business partnerships. School districts could make the idea more appealing for the businesses to fund by providing them with a space on a brochure to be sent to homes, giving the usual details about the hotline (number and time to call, etc.). The company could utilize that space to say something like the following, for example:

> "The funding for this homework hotline has been provided by the _____ company, which is proud to be involved in the education of your children."

Many telephone and video homework hotlines have sprung up throughout this country, partly as a result of the excellence in education movement of the 1980's. This study has provided valuable empirical data for school districts which are considering the establishment of a homework hotline or which already have such a service operational in their districts. The questionnaires used in this study are available through ERIC (ED 276764, TM 860715) and will facilitate further research in this area.

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